

# *DECADE*

*A role-playing game of reunions*

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# **DECADE**

## **An Iron Game Chef 2006 Entry**

Decade is the role-playing game of reunions. Take a group of old friends and put them together at a New Year's party every year for ten years. The booze flows freely - and so do the old grudges, affections and secrets. Time changes us all, but not always as much as we'd like to think!

### ***Restriction: Ten One-Hour Sessions***

Each session takes one hour, and lasts from 11pm to midnight on New Year's Eve. Each session begins exactly one year after the last, so the game takes place over a decade.

Character advancement takes place outside the hour of session, but lasts only a few minutes at the beginning and end of each.

### ***Ingredient: Ancient***

The characters focus on their shared past.

In addition, ten years is long enough to make anyone feel ancient by the end!

### ***Ingredient: Emotion***

The central game mechanic revolves around Staking and winning emotions in Scenes.

The New Year is certainly an emotional time - and even more emotional when it's old friends you're spending it with.

### ***Ingredient: Glass***

The characters (and players!) toast each other at the New Year to end each session.

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# Introduction

## *What Is Decade?*

Decade is a role-playing game of reunions. The game takes place over ten sessions, each of which is set between 11pm and midnight on New Year's Eve. Each session takes place exactly one year after the last. Over the course of the ten sessions, you will tell a story about a group of people who keep coming back together, despite all the changes that happen in their lives over a decade. Whether they love each other, hate each other, need each other, or a little bit of each, the story of this group is your story.

## *Materials*

To play Decade, you will need:

- Four to eight players
- The Decade card deck
- Index cards and pencils
- A one-hour timer or a clock
- A bottle of champagne or sparkling cider
- One glass for each player
- Your imagination!

## Guests and Hosts

Decade takes place entirely at a New Year's party. When your group gets together to play Decade, therefore, the person who is hosting the get-together has the role of Host. Your character will actually be hosting the party, just as you are actually hosting the game. Everyone else is a Guest at the party.

For most purposes, Hosts and Guests are identical during play. Both Hosts and Guests can tell stories about their characters or play NPCs for other players. However, the Host has a few additional duties and abilities beyond those of the Guests.

1. The Host is responsible for organizing the time and place of sessions.
2. The Host creates the Premise for the game and makes sure that all players know what it is. (See "Starting The Game.")
3. The Host decides the composition of the Decade deck used for a particular game, and may modify it between sessions. (See "Ending the Game" and Appendix I.)
4. The Host designates which Guest begins the first Scene. (See "At The Party.")
5. The Host can introduce any character, including themselves, into a Scene. (See "At The Party.")
6. The Host is responsible for timekeeping during Scenes, and may end a Scene which goes on too long. (See "At The Party.")
7. The Host must hand out glasses with twenty minutes left on the clock, pour the champagne with ten minutes left, and start the countdown to midnight with one minute left. (See "One Minute to Midnight.")
8. The Host has the final authority to arbitrate any disagreement between Guests, if the Guests cannot come to an agreement themselves through voting.

In every other way, the Host is identical to the rest of the Guests and has the same role in the game. Unless otherwise specified, the term "Guest" includes both Guests and Host.

Generally, the person who organizes a game of Decade will take the role of Host. However, if the organizer is not hosting the game at his or her own house, the person who is actually hosting the party gets first shot at the Host role, with Host duties passing to the organizer as a second choice. Alternately, either the organizer or the actual Host can nominate any other player to be the Host, so long as that player is willing to take on the Host duties.

The group can change hosts between sessions, particularly if they do not always meet at the same place. This can provide an interesting change-up to the game and should be explained narratively as well as logistically.

# What's In The Cards

## *Cards? Huh?*

Decade uses a custom card deck to help invent stories, to resolve conflicts and to score points during play. This deck has cards of twelve different colors, which correspond to the twelve distinct emotions that Aristotle outlines in the *Rhetoric*. Cards represent your stock of drama and emotional tension.

Every card in the game must be in one of four places: someone's hand, someone's Kept pile, the draw deck or the discard pile. Each player has a hand of her own. Each player also has a pile of cards in front of her, which are cards she has been allowed to keep. The draw and discard piles are in the center, available to all players.

Cards in your hand represent your potential energy – the amount of drama and passion that you have stored up for potential use during the party. They are used to enforce your vision of how the story should go.

Cards in your Kept pile represent the amount of emotional drama that you have contributed to the game so far. They are used to give you points that you can use to advance your character during each year.

The draw pile represents the amount of potential drama left in the game. If the draw pile ever runs out of cards, shuffle the discard pile and use it as the draw pile.

The discard pile is where players put cards that they have used up. Cards never come back from the discard pile unless the draw deck runs out of cards.

## *The Twelve Emotions*

There are twelve different colors of cards, each representing an emotion. Each pair of emotions represents an opposition of some kind.

Anger (Red) Fury, rage, and other types of anger.	Mildness (White) Calm. This emotion includes contentment, peace and the settling of old scores.
Love (Pink) Generally love for an individual; love for a group would fall under benevolence.	Hate (Black) Disgust, hatred, or other negative emotions that lack the fury of anger.
Fear (Yellow) Anything from nervousness to outright phobia.	Confidence (Purple) A sense of competence and ability. Alternately, hope, courage or pride.

<p style="text-align: center;">Shame (Gray)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A feeling of embarrassment or guilt about what others may know.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Shamelessness (Silver)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Not caring what others may think about you.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Benevolence (Brown)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Disinterested kindness to others.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Envy (Green)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jealousy of what someone else possesses. This emotion also includes romantic jealousy.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Indignation (Orange)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pain at the sight of undeserved good fortune. Self-righteousness and contempt might also fall under this category.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pity (Blue)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">A feeling of sadness when someone suffers unjustly. This also includes empathy and compassion.</p>

Note that there are several emotions that we are used to thinking of as unitary categories which are not represented above. For example, “sorrow,” “joy” and “surprise” are not on the list. Players will need to figure out ways to convey these emotions by drawing on Aristotle’s basic building blocks!

### *Where Can I Get Cards?*

For printable Decade cards, and for more information about building and customizing your Decade deck, please see Appendix I.

### *Using Cards*

Cards get used for four things during the game: starting Scenes, initiating challenges, bidding on challenges and scoring points. We’ll briefly touch on each of these things here, but for more details please see the “During The Party” and “New Year’s Resolutions” sections.

To start a Scene, you must take cards from your hand and lay them in front of you. This gives you the right to start a scene about your character, along with any other characters that you invite. If by the end of the scene, you have explored the emotions that your cards represent, you may put the cards in your Kept pile. Otherwise you discard them.

To initiate a challenge, you must simply hold up cards from your hand when another player says something that you do not agree with. (This can be a fact that they are establishing or an action that they are taking.) If you win the challenge, you give your cards to the losing player. Otherwise you keep them in your hand.

To bid on a challenge, you may counter someone else's challenge with cards from your hand. You must bid more cards than they challenged with. If you win the challenge, you give your cards to the losing player. Otherwise you keep them in your hand.

To score points, you will count up the numbers and types of cards in your Kept pile. The more different emotions you have, and the more cards of a particular emotion, the more points you will receive. Points are used to advance your character between sessions.



# Starting the Game

## *Premises*

The first thing you will need to do in order to play Decade is to figure out the Premise of your game. Decade does not tell you when and where to set your game. It only defines that you are a group who has been united by past experiences, and which has decided to reunite yearly because of it. A Premise tells you the specifics of how that happens.

The Premise of a game of Decade is set by the Host before the game begins, though Guests are certainly welcome to make suggestions. When your group is figuring out when and where to meet to play Decade, you should also be sure to establish the Premise of the particular game that you will be playing.

A Premise for Decade has four parts: WHO, HOW, WHEN and WHERE.

### *WHO are you?*

This question does not imply character creation. In fact, players should not come with characters to the first session, as characters are created during play (see “Arrival”). However, the Host should decide some basic outlines of who characters might be. Are you Vietnam veterans, or retired superheroes, or college alums?

### *HOW do you know each other?*

This question should follow quite naturally from the first. Were the characters the ‘bad crowd’ in their middle-class high-school? If they’re the cast and crew of a famous movie, what movie did they work on? This question defines the thing that brought the group together, which all players should be aware of so that they can refer to it in play.

### *WHERE do you meet?*

This question defines both the specific location where the Guests meet (a remote ski lodge in Aspen, for example, or a run-down apartment on the Rive Gauche), and the world in which the game exists if it is not in our world. For example, one could run a game of Decade set in the Harry Potter universe, where alumni of Hogwarts get together to talk about the “good old days.” This question is where one would establish that the game is taking place in the Potterverse.

### *WHEN does the game begin?*

Since the game will last for ten years, establishing a specific year in which the game begins can be quite important. A game that starts in the mid-sixties would want to take Vietnam into account; one set in France under the Sun King would likely want to know the state of King Louis’s health. While Decade does not have to take any events outside the reunion into account, being familiar with the time period that the game is set in will help you stay on the same page with the other Guests.

Note that the section explaining the questions is likely longer than it would take to establish a Premise for a game of Decade. A sample Premise might look like this:

“Anyone up for a game of Decade? Let’s play cops in Queens in the eighties. We’ll be getting together at the department holiday party each year. (Those cheapskates never order enough Bud!) What do you say we start in ’82? Things in New York were pretty sketchy then.”

For more sample Premises, please see the “Sample Settings” section.

### *Example of Play*

*Jane decides she wants to begin a game of Decade. She sends out an email to her friends asking who else wants to play, and suggesting a group of high-school friends beginning in 1996 and moving through to the present day as the Premise. Mark, Linda, Raoul and Iris all say they want to play. Iris suggests that the characters might be art-school graduates dealing with whether or not they succeed or fail in the real world. Jane likes the idea, so she incorporates it into the Premise. When she announces the first session, she specifies that these art-school graduates are gathering for their first New Year’s out of school at her character’s run-down studio in San Francisco.*

### *Other Preparations*

The Host must decide the composition of the Decade deck that will be used for this game. See Appendix I for more details. Once a deck composition is chosen, she should shuffle the Decade cards together and place the deck somewhere easily accessible and visible.

The Host should also have index cards and pencils available near the front door of her house (or the entrance of whatever space they are playing in). Finally, she should make sure that she has easy access to their timer, glasses, and sparkly beverage, as she will need all three during play.

## Arriving at the Party

While a game of Decade is run tabletop style, character creation is handled in a more LARP-like fashion. When you arrive at your first session of Decade, you are in character from the moment you walk in the Host's front door. Unfortunately, you have no idea what that character is. Your fellow players will be creating your character for you.

When you arrive, you should immediately grab an index card (or a piece of paper, if you tend to keep extensive notes or have bad handwriting!) and a pencil. Any players who are present, including the Host, may greet your character, ask them questions, or reminisce with them. Any facts established about your character in this way must go on your character sheet. You cannot refute any facts established during character creation.

Once you have three facts established about your character, you may go pick up your Decade cards, taking the top three cards off the deck. However, you may also choose to delay picking up your Decade cards and let other players continue to establish facts about you. The more facts that you allow other characters to establish about you, the more cards you start the game with. For each fact that you allow someone to establish, you get one additional card when you go get your cards, up to a maximum of ten. It may be worth it to allow the other players to invent more facts about you in order to get more cards!

When you pick up your Decade cards, character creation ends. You can socialize in-character with the other players, or you can establish facts about new arrivals. You cannot, however, establish further facts about characters whose players have already picked up their Decade cards. Additionally, you cannot establish any fact that directly contradicts something that is already on the character sheet for any character.

In sessions after the first, this character-creation process while players are arriving is actually a character-update process. As people arrive, they allow other players to establish things that have happened to them in the past year, as long as those things do not contradict the player's New Year's Resolutions (see "New Year's Resolutions," below). You may, however, update any other facts from their previous character sheet. A rich character may have lost their money; a lifelong bachelor may have married. Until the player picks up their cards for the session, they get no say in the changes that have happened to them over the past year.

Once all players have arrived, the Host starts the clock. It is 11pm, and the game begins!

### *Example of Play*

*Raoul is the first to arrive at Jane's house for the first session of the game. As soon as he walks in, he adopts the swaggering walk of the character he's hoping to portray. Jane rushes up to him and kisses him on both cheeks. "Adam! I can't believe you flew in from*

*New York – I thought you were broke!” Jane exclaims. Raoul notes that his character’s name is Adam and he lives in New York as he responds to Jane. “Yeah,” he shrugs, incorporating his ideas about his character as an arrogant swaggerer, “I sold a piece unexpectedly last night and bought a ticket. First-class, of course.” The doorbell rings to announce Linda, so Jane hurries off to greet her and get a crack at establishing character information. Raoul has two facts established about his character, so he also goes to greet Linda in hopes of finding a third. Until he has a third fact established, he can’t pick up his Decade cards.*

### *Alternative Character Creation Methods*

Not all groups may want to be in-character from the moment they walk in the door. Some groups might like to socialize pre-play, while others aren’t comfortable with collaboratively created characters. For those groups, here are two other methods of character creation.

#### *Starting the Clock*

If the group prefers to socialize before starting character creation, the Host must announce the beginning of the game. At that point, all players are ushered out of the room. One by one (or two by two), they return in whatever order they prefer. Character creation proceeds as above.

#### *Collusion*

If players prefer to have more control over the character creation process, each player can inform the rest of the group of the character that he intends to play. Without establishing too much detail, he can ask the rest of the group to abide by his choices and address him as the character that he’s picked. The character thus established may be considered as factual, above, and cannot be refuted by other players, though it can be added to or modified at will.

## During the Party

### *Starting Scenes*

Once the party has begun, the Host designates a Guest who may start the first Scene.

To begin a Scene, the designated Guest must put one card up as a Stake for the Scene. This card is placed face-up in front of the player so that everyone can see the color and read the word on the card.

The Guest may invite other players to join them in the scene. The Scene-starter may play one additional card in their Stake for each player who joins them. Guests may refuse to join the scene for no penalty, and the Scene-starter does not get to play an additional card for Guests who refuse to participate.

Every Guest who joins a scene may Stake as many cards as they like, up to a limit of the number of Guests in the Scene. However, invited Guests do not have to Stake any cards if they do not want to.

Once the Scene-starter has invited all the Guests they wish, the Host may, if they wish, add an additional Guest to the scene. They may add themselves or any other Guest in the game. However, this Guest may play only one card in their Stake. It's no fun being an uninvited Guest!

Once the Guests for the Scene have been decided and all cards at Stake put out for viewing, the Scene begins!

### *Example of Play*

*Jane asks Mark to begin the first Scene, since he's played Decade before and will help the others learn how to play as things progress. Mark puts out an "Envy" card as his initial Stake. He invites Iris and Raoul to join him in the Scene. Iris agrees, but Raoul says that he'd rather wait and watch the first Scene to see how things run. Iris and Mark can now both Stake up to two cards. Mark Stakes another "Envy," while Iris Stakes "Anger" and "Love." They both glance at Jane to see if she wants to add anyone to the Scene, but she shakes her head. It seems that it will just be Iris's and Mark's characters in the Scene, with envy, anger and love at stake.*

### *Running Scenes*

The goal of a Scene is to embody the emotions that are at Stake. Each player must center the story around the emotions in her own Stake, though she is welcome to incorporate other emotions if she wishes.

During a Scene, the characters can talk to one another, establish facts, take actions, or reminisce about times past. While players are encouraged to remain in-character at all times during a Scene, summarizing events or conversations is also possible (though it may count against you at the end of the scene when the Stake is judged!). Players may do or say anything they like, provided they do not either contradict established facts or take direct control of another Guest. Guests may lie, shade the truth, spread rumors, or otherwise try to avoid the facts – but they cannot out-and-out contradict them in the reality of the game without a Challenge (see below). Similarly, a Guest may take actions that affect other Guests, but they cannot dictate how the other Guests will respond to their actions.

In general, there are five major ways that characters can interact. They are as follows:

#### *In-the-moment Interaction*

Most immersive role-playing would fall into this category. Guests can confess their love for one another, admit to crimes, yell, scream, and otherwise interact based on facts that have already been established. For example, Jill might laugh at Jack when he confesses his love for her.

#### *Offering Options*

Guests can offer their Scene partners a chance to establish facts about themselves. For example, Jack might ask Jill, “So, do you have any children?” This offers Jill an opportunity to decide whether or not she has children, and whether she would like to introduce any plot regarding her existent or non-existent progeny. Jill could respond with a simple no, by describing her eldest daughter in mind-numbing detail, or by running out of the room in tears for no apparent reason. It is up to Jill to decide!

#### *Establishing Facts*

Guests can present their partners with a fait-accompli of sorts regarding facts. For example, Jack might ask Jill, “So, how is your daughter?” Jill must respond as if she had a daughter, unless she wishes to Challenge the statement. She can describe her daughter or talk about her daughter’s death in a tragic accident, but she cannot deny that she has one. Establishing facts about another Guest is open to Challenge (see below).

#### *Reminiscing*

Guests can talk about the Good Old Days – and they likely will, given that Decade is a game of reunions. A Guest who is reminiscing can tell stories about the characters’ shared past. For example, Jill could reminisce about when she and Jack used to sneak out late at night and meet for ice cream at the one all-night store in town, thinking their parents would never find out. These stories are open to Challenge (see below).

#### *Taking Actions*

Players can declare that their Guest is taking an action of some kind. For example, Jill could slap Jack, or Jack could down an entire bottle of vodka. The player need only declare what they want their character to do. Guest actions are open to Challenge (see below).

Of course, players and characters can both be extremely innovative. If a player does something that does not fall under one of the categories listed above, the Guests involved will need to improvise responses based on whether or not any actions are being taken or any facts established. Nonetheless, these categories should be useful in thinking about what players and characters can do during a Scene!

Finally, any facts established about the Guests during a scene should be added to the character sheet as they come up. For example, Jill may scream at Jack about his constant affairs. Jack may wish to note that he has constant affairs – or to challenge the notion of his affairs, as in the “Challenges” section below.

### ***Example of Play***

*Iris’s character, Annie Mae, and Mark’s character, Vonda, are in a Scene together, with Envy, Anger and Love at stake. Vonda begins by asking Annie Mae whether she ever managed to sell that big triptych she made as her senior project. This establishes the fact that Annie Mae painted a triptych as her senior project. Iris doesn’t mind that, so Annie Mae responds that she gave it away. “Gave it away?” gasps Vonda, horrified. “Sure,” says Annie, looking sad. “What’s the point of keeping a piece once it’s over and done?” The scene continues on with the two of them discussing the fate of the painting which Annie Mae gave to a lover, and which Vonda was hoping to sneakily pass off as her own work.*

### ***NPCs***

While the Guests will spend most of their time interacting with each other, there may sometimes be a need for NPCs. These NPCs may be named (for example, the spouse or child of a Guest) or unnamed (the bartender). They may have been previously established, or they may be invented on the spot.

There are two ways to handle NPCs.

First, the players may simply declare what the NPC says or does. These statements are subject to Challenge as below. Any player may take over the NPC at any point; the NPC may not ‘belong’ to any of the invited Guests in a Scene. For example, Iris might have Annie Mae’s lover, Joey, show up at the party. She could declare actions for Joey, such as crashing the party, or speak for Joey as a character and have him reproach Annie Mae for leaving him. However, any other Guest in the scene also has the right to control Joey if they want to!

More often, though, a non-participating Guest will take the role of an NPC. Any Guest who has not been invited to be in a Scene can play an NPC. Each time they step in as an NPC, they may draw a card from the deck. When the NPC is Challenged, they will also have the opportunity to draw a card. See the “Challenges” section immediately below.

### *Example of Play*

*Iris narrates Annie Mae’s ex-lover, Joey, barging in on the party. As she begins to describe him making a bee-line for the bar, Linda steps in. “I’ll take Joey,” she says, drawing a card. Taking over the character, she declares that Joey has a bottle of vodka by the neck and is heading for Annie Mae.*

### *Challenges*

Sometimes during a scene, a Guest will do something that another Guest wishes to oppose, or a Guest will say something that another Guest does not wish to become fact. For example, Edna might try to slap Mary, or Paul might recall John’s heavy drug use in college. In this case, the dissenting player would issue a Challenge. A player does not need to be present in the scene to issue a Challenge; they need only want to contradict what is currently happening.

A Challenge is issued by saying, “Challenge,” and holding up a number of cards that you bid on the Challenge. If the challenged player yields, the challenger gives them the cards and the challenger wins the conflict. Otherwise, the challenged player may counter-bid exactly once, and they must exceed the number of cards bid by the challenger. In that case they give the cards to the challenger, who also keeps the cards they bid, but the challenged player wins the conflict.

Challenging an NPC is slightly different. NPCs may not initiate challenges in-character. When an NPC is challenged, the Guest playing them has two choices. Either they may yield to the challenge and draw a card, or they may oppose the challenge and forfeit their chance to draw. The challenging player risks no cards in challenging an NPC, but does give the Guest playing them opportunities to draw cards. It’s a tricky balance!

When a Challenge is resolved, the winner may negate an action or contradict a fact – or, alternately, declare it to be entirely successful or true. A winning challenger might say, “Edna fails to hit Mary,” or “John never did drugs.” A challenged player defending their position could describe how Edna leaves a red handprint on Mary’s face, or give a few gory details from John’s time in rehab. The winner may also use any shading between complete negation and complete agreement. For example, perhaps John never did anything stronger than pot, or perhaps Edna barely scratches Mary with her nails. The winner gets to decide!



Of course, players may reinterpret, misinterpret, or otherwise try to get out of an unpleasant situation without ever issuing a Challenge. For example, John might establish that he had the *reputation* of having a drug problem even though he never actually had one, or Mary might establish that Edna is quite weak and doesn't hit hard. This kind of maneuvering, however, can never entirely negate the original statement. Only a Challenge can do that!

### *Example of Play*

*Vonda has gotten Joey in a corner and is trying to pump him for the location of Annie Mae's triptych. Iris declares, "Annie Mae hears what Vonda is saying and marches over there in a huff!" Mark doesn't want that to happen, so he says, "Challenge," and holds up three cards – saving himself two for future challenges in case he wins this one. Iris considers whether she wants to hand over four cards to Mark, and decides she'd rather keep them for future challenges. "Okay," she says, and takes the three cards from Mark. Annie Mae now cannot overhear Vonda's conversation with Joey – or that Joey has just agreed to sell the painting to Vonda for twenty bucks and a bottle of scotch.*

### *Frivolous Challenges*

Since yielding to challenges and having a challenge out-bid by the defender are both ways to get cards, it is important to make sure that players do not make challenges frivolously. Players can 'game the system' by making ridiculous statements which other players must challenge – for example, "Hi, Mary, how's your hamster farm?" – or by issuing challenges over every statement which seems important to the issuing player, forcing them to repeatedly counter-bid.

Players should recall that frivolous challenges are likely to keep them from being invited to participate in Scenes, and from having players agree to participate in the Scenes that they start. They may get plenty of cards from these challenge tactics, but they will never have an opportunity to turn those cards into points.

Nonetheless, some groups may find that they have players who persistently make frivolous statements or issue frivolous challenges. With the consent of the rest of the group, the Host may penalize these players by negating their statements, declaring their Challenges spurious, forcing them to discard any ill-gotten cards, or even evicting them from the game. The Host's power to arbitrate difficulties with Guests is meant precisely for situations such as these, and the Host should not hesitate to use such powers!

If it is the Host who is the difficult player and social methods of persuasion fail, the group is recommended to stick it out until the end of the session, and move the game to another player's house for the next session of Decade. Alternately, the group may depose the Host and choose a new Host on the spot by narrating how all their characters leave the

Host's house and go somewhere else for the rest of the party.

### *Ending Scenes*

When the Guests have finished their interaction, the Scene ends. However, if the Scene goes on too long, the Host has the power to end the Scene. The Scene may last five minutes, plus one minute for each additional Guest in the scene. After this time is up, the Host may (if they wish) call for the Guests to end things.

When the Scene is done, each player has a chance to claim her Stake. Starting with the Guest who initiated the Scene and passing to the left, the player reads the emotion off each card in her Stake. By saying, "I claim Envy," the player is claiming that she portrayed Envy well during her Scene. This gives her the right to move this card to her Kept pile.

If no other player disagrees, the claiming player successfully moves the card to her Kept pile. If any player disagrees that the player has a claim to the emotion at hand, and this is seconded by another player, the card is put in the discard pile instead.

Once the Stake has been moved to either the Kept or the discard pile, play passes to the left. The next Guest (or the Host, if it is their turn) has the opportunity to initiate a new scene.

### *Example of Play*

*At the conclusion of their scene, Mark and Iris get to claim their Stakes. Mark begins by saying, "I claim Envy." Everyone nods – Vonda certainly was trying to snag some of Annie Mae's talent. Iris follows up with, "I claim Love." There's a moment of debate, but the players agree that even though Annie Mae didn't love Joey, she certainly explored the emotion of love in the scene. Mark tries to claim the second Envy, but Jane points out that she's not sure that Vonda really deserves two of the same emotion when she only was envious of one thing about Annie Mae. Linda seconds this, so Mark puts his second Envy in the discard pile. Finally, Iris tosses her Anger card into the discard pile; she never got a chance to bring it up in play, so she doesn't even bother asking the group.*

### *Getting Cards, Losing Cards*

There are three ways to get cards in your hand in Decade: allowing players to establish facts about your character during the pre-game mingling, playing NPCs for someone else's scene, and yielding to challenges as an NPC.

There are three ways to lose cards in your hand in Decade: by putting them in your Kept

pile at the end of a successful scene, by losing them to the discard pile at the end of an unsuccessful scene, or by ceding them to another player after a successful challenge.

There is only one way to gain Kept cards in Decade: by claiming the emotional Stakes at the end of a successful Scene.

There is only one way to lose Kept cards in Decade: by not having someone to kiss at midnight. Make sure you don't get left out!

## One Minute To Midnight

As midnight approaches, the session moves toward a close. The Host is responsible for time-keeping via champagne. With twenty minutes left on the clock, the Host hands each player a glass. With ten minutes left, the Host fills the glasses with champagne. With one minute left, the Host initiates the countdown to midnight. And at midnight, the players all clink their glasses and drink!

During the one minute before the end of session, all Guests must declare who they are kissing at midnight. This person may be a PC or an NPC. If the Guest kisses an NPC, the player simply declares it and succeeds, unless they are Challenged; there is no mechanical effect. If two PCs agree to kiss, they may exchange up to three of their Kept cards with each other. If any Guest is left without someone to kiss at midnight, they must discard one of their Kept cards.

As the players drink their champagne, they must describe the immediate aftermath of their New Year's kiss. Did it go well? Did they get slapped? Guests who kiss each other may only describe their own reaction, but no one may issue Challenges since the session is done.

### *Example of Play*

*Linda declares that her character, Marnie, is kissing Adam. Adam's player, Raoul, agrees, so the two of them exchange some of their Kept cards. Linda takes two Benevolence from Raoul, and gives him a Pity and an Indignation. As they drink their champagne, Raoul describes Adam's feelings as he realizes what a very attractive woman Marnie is – and cringes a little as Linda describes how Marnie finds Adam's romantic style just a bit too aggressive.*

## New Year's Resolutions

Once the session is over, each player calculates her points for the game. Points are calculated by taking the number of different emotions that are represented in your Kept pile, and multiplying by the number of cards in the dominant emotion. For example, if Sandra has 1 Anger, 2 Pity, 2 Hatred and 3 Benevolence, then she would score  $4 * 3$  or 12 points.

Points are used to buy New Year's Resolutions. These are things that you are establishing about your character for the coming year that you certainly want to happen. For example, Cecelia might decide that her Resolution is to get promoted. Unless other players intervene, Cecelia will certainly get promoted during the coming year.

The number of points a player puts into a Resolution is called its Strength. Other players can intervene in a Resolution by discarding cards from their hand.

If all the players (together) discard cards equal to a Resolution's Strength, they may add a major negative element to the Resolution. For example, Cecelia might get promoted, but hate her new job.

If all the players (together) discard cards equal to twice a Resolution's Strength, the Resolution is completely negated, and the player loses the points she put in. No promotion for Cecelia!

Resolution-making begins with the player with the most points and continues to the left. Each player makes one resolution, then passes to the next player in the circle. Players may spend as many points as they wish on a Resolution. If a player has points left, she must make a Resolution of some kind. If a player has no points left, she must pass to the next player without making a Resolution, even if other players still have points.

### *Example of Play*

*Raoul has a Pity, an Indignation, a Hate, and two Confidence. This gives him  $4 * 2$ , or 8 points, to spend on Resolutions. He decides he really wants Adam to become famous over the next year, so he puts five of his points into "Adam resolves to get a solo show at a well-known gallery in Chelsea." Linda puts down three cards from her hand toward negating this Resolution, since she wants Marnie to be more successful than Adam. After some discussion, Mark adds two more cards, giving them the five cards they need. Their cards are discarded, and Linda tells Raoul that Adam may get the show he wants, but only if he rejects every artistic lesson that his favorite professor taught him in order to do so. Raoul grits his teeth, but has to agree. After all, they spent five cards to limit Adam's success – and by the time his turn to make a Resolution comes around again, people won't have as many cards in their hands to oppose him.*

## **Play Between Sessions**

Decade does not lend itself to inter-session play. Communication between sessions should be limited to logistical discussions, such as where the group will meet next, or to reminding players of any real-world events that happened during the year in question so that all players can refer to them.

## Ending the Game

The last session of a game of Decade will, for whatever reason, be the last time this group will meet. The bonds which have united the characters may be fraying; their tensions and hatreds may overcome their affection for each other; they may simply be moving on to a different stage in their lives. Your group should decide the reason why your group is breaking up, depending on the story that you have established up to this point. By the end of the final session, the characters should realize that their close-knit group is dissolving, and say their final goodbyes – one way or another.

It is recommended that the Host remove certain emotions from the Decade deck for the last session, in order to mechanically enforce the theme of endings and dissolution.

If the group is ending because the characters still care for each other, but are moving on with their lives, the Host should remove cards which might introduce new conflicts between the characters. Envy, Shame and Hate should be the first to go.

If the group is ending because the characters' hate for each other is outgrowing their mutual affection, the Host should remove cards which might introduce new positive bonds between the characters. Love, Benevolence and Pity should be the first to go.

If the group is ending for some other reason, the Host should use her own discretion in deciding which emotions to remove from the mix. It is recommended that she remove at least three, if not more, to focus the game toward an ending point.

The Host may, of course, choose not to tamper with the cards at all. This is at her discretion.

### *Example of Play*

*In the last session of her game of Decade, Jane decides that the group will break up because they come to hate and resent each other. She takes all the Love, Benevolence, Mildness and Pity cards out of the deck. That should bring things to a head!*

## Sample Settings

Decade can work well with a variety of tones and genres. The following five settings are meant to illustrate the many ways in which a reunion can be interpreted.

### *Setting One: The Artists*

Who: The characters are artists, ex-artists or failed artists.

How: They know each other from an elite art school where they formed a talented clique.

Where: The studio of one of the group, where they swore they'd meet every year.

When: Game begins in 1996.

### *Setting Two: Over The Top, Boys*

Who: The characters are veterans of WWII.

How: They were in the same squad.

Where: The comfortable suburban home of their squad leader.

When: Game begins in 1946.

### *Setting Three: For Great Justice*

Who: The characters are aging superheroes.

How: They used to be in a supergroup together.

Where: In their orbital space-station.

When: Game begins in 2006.

### *Setting Four: Potter Mania*

Who: The characters are graduates of Hogwarts.

How: They were all in the same House and school year.

Where: In a pub in Diagon Alley.

When: Game begins in the year of Harry's birth.

### *Setting Five: Glitz and Glamour*

Who: The characters are the 'it' girls and boys of Hollywood.

How: They're competing for the same roles and box office numbers.

Where: The house of director Titus Wells, the only New Year's Party worth attending.

When: Game begins in 1922.



## Appendix I: The Card Deck

Sample cards, which you can print out, are included at the end of this appendix. It is recommended that you copy the cards onto colored paper, if possible, to make it easy for players to recognize what their dominant emotion for a session of Decade is. However, simple cards with the names of the emotions on them will also do just fine.

The Host must decide what card mix she will use for her game of Decade. When designing an original card mix, the Host should take into account the desired flavor of the game, the skill of the players at portraying emotions, and how the card mix might change over the course of the game to shape its emotional arc. For the Host who prefers not to worry about it too much, we provide four sample card mixes.

### *The Classic Mix*

Include equal proportions of all cards in the deck, with at least two copies of each card per player.

### *The Beginner Mix*

For beginners, load the deck with the easier-to-portray emotions like anger, fear, love and hate. We recommend the following for each player: 2 Anger, 1 Mildness, 3 Love, 3 Hate, 2 Fear, 2 Confidence, 2 Shame, 0 Shamelessness, 0 Benevolence, 2 Envy, 1 Indignation, 1 Pity.

### *The Friendship Mix*

For a not-too-dark game, include plenty of positive emotions along with some of the more relationship-oriented negative emotions. We recommend the following for each player: 2 Anger, 2 Mildness, 2 Love, 0 Hate, 2 Fear, 1 Confidence, 2 Shame, 0 Shamelessness, 2 Benevolence, 1 Envy, 2 Indignation, 2 Pity.

### *The Backstabbing Mix*

If, conversely, you want your characters to behave cruelly to each other, we suggest mixing the darker emotions with just enough positive ones to provide motivation besides out-and-out meanness. We recommend the following for each player: 3 Anger, 0 Mildness, 3 Love, 3 Hate, 2 Fear, 1 Confidence, 1 Shame, 2 Shamelessness, 0 Benevolence, 2 Envy, 2 Indignation, 1 Pity.

<b>ANGER</b>	<b>ANGER</b>	<b>ANGER</b>
<b>MILDNESS</b>	<b>MILDNESS</b>	<b>MILDNESS</b>
<b>LOVE</b>	<b>LOVE</b>	<b>LOVE</b>
<b>HATE</b>	<b>HATE</b>	<b>HATE</b>

<b>FEAR</b>	<b>FEAR</b>	<b>FEAR</b>
<b>CONFIDENCE</b>	<b>CONFIDENCE</b>	<b>CONFIDENCE</b>
<b>SHAME</b>	<b>SHAME</b>	<b>SHAME</b>
<b>SHAMELESSNESS</b>	<b>SHAMELESSNESS</b>	<b>SHAMELESSNESS</b>

<b>BENEVOLENCE</b>	<b>BENEVOLENCE</b>	<b>BENEVOLENCE</b>
<b>ENVY</b>	<b>ENVY</b>	<b>ENVY</b>
<b>INDIGNATION</b>	<b>INDIGNATION</b>	<b>INDIGNATION</b>
<b>PITY</b>	<b>PITY</b>	<b>PITY</b>